

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

July 27, 2010

Good afternoon, everybody. I just concluded a productive discussion with the leaders of both parties in Congress. This was one of a series of regular meetings that I called for in the State of the Union because I think it's important for us to come together and speak frankly about the challenges we face and to work through areas where we don't agree; hopefully, find some areas where we do.

Our conversation today focused on an issue that's being discussed every day at kitchen tables across this country, and that's how do we create jobs that people need to support their families.

I believe that starts with doing everything we can to support small businesses. These are the stores, the restaurants, the startups, and other companies that create two out of every three new jobs in this country and that grow into the big businesses that transform industries here in America and around the world.

But we know that many of these businesses still can't get the loans and the capital they need to keep their doors open and hire new workers. That's why we've proposed steps to get them that help: eliminating capital gains taxes on investments; making it easier for small lenders to support small businesses; expanding successful SBA programs to help these businesses access the capital that they need.

This is how we create jobs, by investing in the innovators and entrepreneurs that have always driven our prosperity. These are the kind of commonsense steps that folks from both parties have supported in the past, steps to cut taxes and spur private sector growth and investment. And I hope that in the coming days, we'll once again find common ground and get this legislation passed. We shouldn't let America's small businesses be held hostage to partisan politics and certainly not at this critical time.

We also talked about the need to move forward on energy reform. The Senate is now poised to act before the August recess, advancing legislation to respond to the BP oil spill and create new clean energy jobs.

That legislation is an important step in the right direction, but I want to emphasize it's only the first step. And I intend to keep pushing for broader reform, including climate legislation, because if we've learned anything from the tragedy in the Gulf, it's that our current energy policy is unsustainable.

And we can't afford to stand by as our dependence on foreign oil deepens, as we keep on pumping out the deadly pollutants that threaten our air and our water and the lives and livelihoods of our people. And we can't stand by as we let China race ahead to create the clean energy jobs and industries of the future. We should be developing those renewable energy resources and creating those high-wage, high-skill jobs right here in the United States of America. That's what comprehensive energy and climate reform would do. And that's why I intend to keep pushing this issue forward.

I also urged the House leaders to pass the necessary funding to support our efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I know much has been written about this in recent days as a result of the substantial leak of documents from Afghanistan covering a period from 2004 to 2009.

While I'm concerned about the disclosure of sensitive information from the battlefield that could potentially jeopardize individuals or operations, the fact is, these documents don't reveal any issues that haven't already informed our public debate on Afghanistan. Indeed, they point to the same challenges that led me to conduct an extensive review of our policy last fall.

So let me underscore what I've said many times: For 7 years, we failed to implement a strategy adequate to the challenge in this region, the region from which the 9/11 attacks were waged and other attacks against the United States and our friends and allies have been planned.

That's why we've substantially increased our commitment there, insisted upon greater accountability from our partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan, developed a new strategy that can work, and put in place a team, including one of our finest generals, to execute that plan. Now we have to see that strategy through.

And as I told the leaders, I hope the House will act today to join the Senate, which voted unanimously in favor of this funding, to ensure that our troops have the resources they need and that we're able to do what's necessary for our national security.

Finally, during our meeting today, I urged Senator McConnell and others in the Senate to work with us to fill the vacancies that continue to plague our judiciary. Right now we've got nominees who've been waiting up to 8 months to be confirmed as judges. Most of these folks were voted out of committee unanimously or nearly unanimously by both Democrats and Republicans. Both Democrats and Republicans agreed that they were qualified to serve. Nevertheless, some in the minority have used parliamentary procedures time and again to deny them a vote in the full Senate.

Now, if we want our judicial system to work, if we want to deliver justice in our courts, then we need judges on our benches. And I hope that in the coming months, we'll be able to work together to ensure a timelier process in the Senate.

Now, we don't have many days left before Congress is out for the year. And everyone understands that we're less than 100 days from an election. It's during this time that the noise and the chatter about who's up in the polls and which party is ahead threatens to drown out just about everything else.

But the folks we serve—who sent us here to serve, they sent us here for a reason. They sent us here to listen to their voices. They sent us here to represent their interests, not our own. They sent us here to lead. And I hope that in the coming months, we'll do everything in our power to live up to that responsibility.

Thanks very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Congress :: Congressional leaders, meetings.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: McConnell, Addison M. "Mitch"; Petraeus, David H.

Subjects: Congress : Bipartisanship; Terrorism : September 11, 2001, attacks; Afghanistan : NATO International Security Assistance Force, commander; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Afghanistan : U.S. policy review; Afghanistan : WikiLeaks publication of classified U.S. military documents; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Loans to small businesses, increase; Business and industry : Community lenders; Business and industry : Credit freeze situation; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; China : Energy :: Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Congress : Presidential nominations, confirmation process; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : BP p.l.c.; Energy : Energy legislation, proposed; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : National energy policy; Environment : Carbon pollution; Environment : Climate change; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Economic effects and recovery efforts; Gulf of Mexico : Deepwater Horizon oil spill :: Environmental effects and cleanup efforts; Judiciary : Federal court nominations and confirmations; Legislation, proposed : "Small Business Jobs and Credit Act of 2010"; Pakistan : Counterterrorism efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Small Business Administration : Credit and working capital loans, proposed increase; Taxation : Capital gains tax, proposed reduction; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Global threat.

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